

Abstract

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- This poster conveys the results of an empirical study conducted in 2025 involving a short questionnaire that investigated careers guidance practice, focusing on the length of appointments, use of guidance models, and exploration of existential topics in one-to-one settings.
- Data from 84 careers guidance practitioners (CGPs) working across diverse institutions and sectors reveal significant variation in appointment lengths and approaches to guidance model usage.
- The findings show that existential topics – such as career-related anxiety, sense of purpose, and self-identity – are very common in practice and viewed as relevant by practitioners.
- The research received ethical approval from the University of Huddersfield, forms part of a PhD project on the value of integrating existentialism into career guidance in Higher Education, and offers recommendations for future practice and policy.



Research Objectives

Objective 1	Objective 2
To establish the scope of the different roles, institutions, and CGP appointment lengths in HE (and outside for comparison).	To understand what, if any, careers guidance models are commonly being used by CGPs in their appointments in HE (and outside for comparison).
Objective 3	Objective 4
To identify what, if any, existential topics CGPs explore in their work, including which are the most frequent, and which they perceive to be the most valuable, in HE (and outside for comparison).	To establish an early gauge of interest in learning more about existentialism in a careers education context.

What existential topics are relevant to careers guidance?

Themes commonly linked as central to understanding existentialism are the creation of meaning, freedom, responsibility, the demand to define ourselves through choices and the anxiety and responsibility this generates (Gosetti-Ferencei, 2020). In light of a review of the literature relating to the central concerns of existentialism, the approach of existential coaching in applied contexts, and the consideration of careers guidance as an activity that supports clients to engage in self-discovery, find meaning and fulfilment, and understand the bigger picture (Hooley, Sultana & Thompson, 2017; Hambly, 2021), the following existential topics were identified as potentially relevant to careers work:

- Taking responsibility for one's actions; Career-related anxiety; A search for meaning; Freedom (or lack of) to act; Personal identity and sense of self; The struggle to be authentic; and Developing a sense of purpose

% of CGPs who have explored existential topics with, or observed them in, clients in 1-2-1 appointments: Overall, HE, & Non-HE

Existential Topic	Overall (%)	HE (%)	Non-HE (%)
Career-related anxiety	94%	97%	87%
Developing a sense of purpose	83%	85%	78%
Personal identity and sense of self	76%	75%	78%
Taking responsibility for one's actions	73%	69%	83%
Freedom (or lack of) to act	60%	52%	78%
A search for meaning	58%	51%	78%
The struggle to be authentic	48%	51%	39%

Existential Topics – Top 4

- These 4 topics were all:
- Explored to some extent by the highest no. of practitioners
- Most common to explore with, or observe in, clients
- Most relevant to explore in careers guidance work

- Career-related Anxiety
- Developing a sense of purpose
- Personal identity and sense of self
- Taking responsibility for one's actions

Existentialism as part of careers guidance

A notable feature of the findings is that **existential concerns are widely present in client interactions**, with 100% of respondents having encountered at least one topic, and **94% (n:79) identifying three or more**.

This exploration or observation spanned a **wide range of job titles** indicating that it is not only Career Coaches who engage with existential topics, but also Advisers, Consultants, Officers, Leads, Counsellors, and more.

Only 4% of respondents said that they would not be interested in learning more about how to explore any of these topics in a careers related context.

No. of Existential Topics	Overall (%)
0	0%
1	2%
2	4%
3	13%
4	26%
5	16%
6	12%
7	27%

Time, Models, and Meaning: Exploring Appointment Lengths, Practice, and the Presence of Existential Topics in One-to-One Careers Guidance



Headline Data

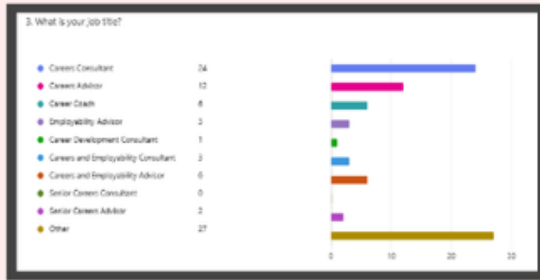
84 CGPs completed the questionnaire

38 different HE institutions represented

35 different job titles given

Places of work:

- Higher education (HE) institutions (n:61)
- Self-employed private practice (n:9)
- Secondary schools (n:6)
- Private organisations (n:5)
- Further education (FE) colleges (n:4)
- Local government (n:2)



The “black box” of guidance practice

In today's changing landscape of careers guidance and employment, with the UK prioritizing getting people into work and educating the future workforce (House of Commons, 2025; Department for Education, 2025), the acknowledgement that **good careers guidance could contribute billions to the UK economy** (Phoenix Insights, 2025), financial pressures placing constraints on HE institutions and their services (Universities UK, 2025) with a quarter of English universities seeing reductions in spending on career development (Roper & Vorley, 2025), and AI potentially offering unprecedented access to personalized career guidance (Duan & Wu, 2024) but humans remaining vital to the process (Morrisby, 2025), the task of gaining up-to-date insight into **what is happening in the “blackbox”** (Reid, 2021) of one-to-one careers guidance practice, rather than *who* and *how* many are accessing it, feels timely.

Key Statistics

38.8

Mean one-to-one appointment length in minutes



83

% of respondents who tend to follow established guidance models



2.75

Mean number of guidance models employed in some form as part of practice



4.9

Mean number of existential topics explored with, or observed in, clients during one-to-one appointments



Questions included in the Questionnaire

- What is your job title?
- What is the name of the institution or company you primarily work for in this role?
- What are the lengths of the one-to-one guidance appointments that you offer (this does NOT include practice interviews)?
- In your appointments, do you tend to follow any established guidance model(s) e.g. GROW, OSKAR, Skilled Helper etc?
- If you answered YES to the previous question, which model(s) do you employ in some form as part of your practice?
- If you answered NO, please briefly say why
- Which of the following topics have you to some extent explored with, or observed in, a client in a one-to-one appointment? (see existential topic list)
- Up to a maximum of FOUR, which of the following topics have you explored with, or observed in, clients the MOST in a one-to-one appointment? (same list as previous question)
- Up to a maximum of FOUR, which of the following topics do you think are the most relevant to explore in careers guidance work in a one-to-one setting? (same list as previous question)
- Would you be interested in learning more about how to explore any of the previously mentioned topics in a careers education context?

Answer formats included multiple choice, binary choice, and short answer free text (an option to select 'none of the above' was also included in multiple choice questions).

Comparison of 1-2-1 Appointment Lengths: Mean, Median, and Mode



Category	Overall (n=84) [mins]	HE Practitioners (n=61) [mins]	Non-HE Practitioners (n=23) [mins]
Mean	38.8	34.7	48.8
Median	35	30	50
Mode	30	30	60

Comparison of No. of Models Employed: Mean, Median, and Mode



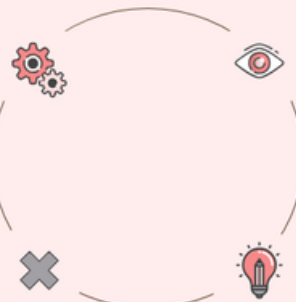
Category	Overall (n=84) [mins]	HE Practitioners (n=61)	Non-HE Practitioners (n=23)
Mean	2.75	3	2.2
Median	3	3	2
Mode	3	3	1

Multiple models

The majority of CGPs, regardless of role, workplace, or appointment length, are not following one guidance model, and most are adopting a combination of 3 different established models.

Not using models

Overall, 17% reported not using established guidance models, but only 4% explicitly because they weren't aware of them.



Discussion Points

Career Anxiety

94% of respondents encountered career-related anxiety, rising to 97% of those working in HE. What does this imply for service design and CDP training resources/courses?

Guidance roles

Existential concerns are widely present in client interactions across a wide range of job titles, challenging some of the distinctions made in guidance work between roles.

Comparison of most commonly identified guidance model usage



Most Common Guidance Models	Overall (n=84)	HE Practitioners (n=61)	Non-HE Practitioners (n=23)
GROW (Whitmore)	60% (n=50)	67% (n=41)	39% (n=9)
Skilled Helper (Egan)	48% (n=40)	44% (n=27)	57% (n=13)
DOTS (Law & Watts)	43% (n=36)	43% (n=26)	43% (n=10)
Counselling Approach (Ali & Graham)	39% (n=33)	46% (n=28)	22% (n=5)

Policy and Practice: Critical Reflection

- The results prompt critical reflection for policymakers, strategic leaders, academics, and managers across the education sector and beyond regarding whether **current, and future planned, careers provision sufficiently accommodates the depth and complexity of the issues that practitioners are addressing**. In particular, the high prevalence of **career-related anxiety**, especially in HE, raises important questions about institutional priorities, including ethical decisions around funding, service design, links with other student support services, and the growing consideration of AI-based guidance alternatives.
- The findings also carry implications for the **design and content of Level 6 and 7 careers guidance qualifications** when linking underpinning theory to the lived reality of practice. Practitioners report a **clear desire to learn more about how to explore existential topics in a careers education context**.
- Resource development informed by this study** should be aimed at anyone in a careers guidance role, responsive to the time constraints of appointments (often 30 minutes or under, especially in HE), and flexible enough to complement the guidance models most commonly employed (GROW, Skilled Helper, DOTS, and the Counselling Approach). These considerations also offer **broad insights into effective resource design for contemporary careers education in any area**.
- The breadth of existential topics observed in practice underscores what CGPs already know, even if the public may not (CDI, 2025a): that **effective careers guidance entails far more than supporting CV development, interview preparation, or the transmission of labour market information**. Rather, it requires the **capacity to engage with clients' foundational philosophical concerns about being human**. As Jennick and Doswell (2024) aptly note, careers guidance is **#somuchmorethantalkingaboutjobs**, and the present findings provide further evidence to support this claim.